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Transforming Thai Preschool Teachers' Knowledge on Inclusive Practice: A Collaborative Inquiry

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Abstract: Educating children with disabilities alongside their peers in mainstream preschools has increased intensely over the past few years, affecting all aspects of early childhood education. Many children who previously would have been educated in segregated special centres are now being included in inclusive preschools. This research paper discusses how Thai preschool teachers' professional knowledge in inclusive education influence the ways they practice within preschool classrooms. Qualitative data obtained through observations and collaborative inquiry with teachers drawn from four preschool in Bangkok, Thailand showed that the lack of adequate teacher preparation for inclusive practice rendered the teachers helpless and unable to deliver curriculum that caters for the learning needs of children with disabilities. This paper contributes to the growing body of research to inform the usefulness of collaborative inquiry in helping teachers explore educational issues in systematic ways and determine solutions through reflection and dialogic inquiry.

Keywords

Collaborative inquiry, Knowledge, Inclusive education, Thailand

Introduction

Over the past three decades the focus on inclusive education has been pervasive and relentless as school systems struggle to meet the needs of students with disability. Today's preschool classrooms include children with a diverse range of skills and learning needs arising from cultural or linguistic diversity, religious beliefs, gender barriers, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, personal circumstances, family disruption and in particular, children with disabilities and special needs (Ashman, 2015). The principles of inclusive education demands that schools create supportive and engaging learning communities for all children (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2012). If teachers are going to be supportive, and promote quality inclusive education that responds to the needs of all children then it is important to adopt a collaborative professional inquiry approach that prepares them for this challenging task (Donohoo, 2013). Inclusive education in the early years can be effective if teachers possess relevant knowledge to deliver pedagogy that meets the learning and developmental needs of all children in inclusive classrooms (Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden & Surtees, 2009; Yeo, Neihart, Tang, Chong & Huan, 2011).

Teachers with appropriate inclusive knowledge can provide high-quality education and respond constructively to the needs of educationally diverse children (Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2014). According to UNESCO (1994)

Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of students, accommodating of both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities (p. 11).

In this sense, all children in inclusive learning environments have the right to access relevant educational resources and to receive an education appropriate for their particular needs (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2013; Allen & Cowdery, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Klibthong, 2013).

Informed by international legislation, policies and philosophies of inclusive education, Thailand has enacted comprehensive policies that demonstrate commitment to equity, social justice and quality education for all children. For instance, essential elements of the National Education Act (1999), outlining education policy for people with disability, included the educational rights for those who are considered limited in intellectual, social and communication skills or those who are incapacitated by mental or physical impairment to receive cost-free early childhood and basic education. In addition, there is provision for support for their diagnosis, the right to access facilities, services and support personnel and the provision of a high standard of education, including appropriate programmes, curriculum, design and assessment for people with additional needs (Office of Education Council, 2006).

Furthermore, the government of Thailand has mandated and implemented civil rights for people with disability and barred discrimination in the areas of employment, basic education, services, worker's compensation, social security and entrepreneurship development (Klibthong, 2013; Klibthong, & Agbenyega, 2014). There have been several Acts geared towards improving education and quality of life for people with disability in Thailand such as The Persons with Disability' Quality of Life Promotion Act B.E. 2550 (2007) and The Persons with Disability Education Act B.E 2551 (2008).

While inclusive education in Thailand looks promising at the policy level, at the practical level, there is need for a major transformation of existing teachers' knowledge from traditional teaching approaches to embrace teaching practices that cater for all children. For example, previous studies showed that the majority of Thai teachers feel unprepared to properly educate children with and without disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014; Dapudong, 2014; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). In this way, many children who are considered difficult to teach are likely to be excluded from classroom activities. In this paper, we investigate how teachers' professional knowledge can be enhanced through collaborative inquiry to influence inclusive practices within preschool classrooms.

Literature review

Several researchers have shown that successful inclusive education and practices largely depend on teachers' professional knowledge of inclusive education, children with disabilities and those with special needs (Allen & Cowdery, 2012; Carrington & Macarthur, 2012; Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Recchia & Lee, 2013). Teachers play a critical role in implementing quality education and developing inclusive environments for all children. Inclusive education is enhanced when educators and other professionals possess extensive professional knowledge and skills in conjunction with a deep commitment to social justice

and inclusion (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; Ashman, 2015). Teachers who critically explore knowledge, research, literature, policy and pedagogical practices through the lens of equity, access, inclusion and achievement will be better able to provide and support inclusive educational programs for all children (Carrington & Macarthur, 2012). It is also important for teachers to modify and adjust various aspects of the teaching and learning process to facilitate optimal learning opportunities for all children (Ashman, 2015).

Teachers who do not have the appropriate knowledge and skills to modify curriculum for children with disabilities, may resort to punishing those children or making negative comments about their abilities if the children do not do well in class (Agbenyega, 2006). Successful inclusive schools are those that specifically and continuously develop their teachers to be able to modify learning tasks for children with disabilities (Agbenyega & Sharma, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Teachers in inclusive schools need to take risk but teachers cannot take risks if they feel they have inadequate knowledge about what they are practising, and risk taking can only occur in a supportive learning environment (Agbenyega & Sharma, 2014). This means, appropriate teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms will not occur spontaneously; they need to be developed. One important aspect that can enhance inclusive learning environments, appropriate teaching strategies and attitude of teachers toward inclusive education is collaborative professional learning through inquiry (Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; Donohoo, 2013; Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden & Surtees, 2009). Through effective teacher education teachers get to know more about the characteristics of each type of disability and how children with special needs can learn more effectively. Teachers also learn about how to modify teaching practices to assist all children and appropriate ways to address behaviours or learning challenges within the classrooms (Lee, Tracey, Barker, Fan & Yeung, 2014). Requisite professional knowledge and appropriate training empowers teachers and reduces the helplessness (Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, Hanson & Brault, 2002) often experienced by teachers in inclusive classrooms. More importantly, teacher training and professional development that prepares teachers to be open to multiple perspectives is powerful for orchestrating high quality inclusive education.

It is argued that effective teachers in inclusive schools work together as learning communities to develop shared values and expectation about children, teaching and teacher's roles, collaborating and sharing expertise to develop the skills and understandings which underlie effective teaching (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner & Krause, 2013). Teacher collaboration with numerous professionals at different levels can improve not only children's outcome but also teachers' knowledge on how to teach diverse children in the classrooms (Hentz & Jones, 2011).

Research methodology

The research work began in 2011 with observations in preschools spanning three years when the second author of this paper was collecting data for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in preschools in Thailand. Although several preschools opened their doors to the researchers, the researchers were interested in working with preschools that had at least four to five children with disabilities enrolled. This criteria yielded two government and two private schools for critical observations. Evidence from different studies on inclusive education of young children suggests that how teachers behave towards children in the classroom, and the instructional approaches they deploy significantly affect children's learning and development (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). For this reason, classroom observation afforded the researchers the opportunity to assess the actual instructional

experience. It also provided the opportunity to view the relationship between teachers' knowledge, skills, beliefs and instructional practices within inclusive classrooms (Westberg, Archambaul, Dobyns & Salvin, 1993).

As researchers, the ultimate goal was to use the observation as a precursor to identify pedagogical issues and to assist the teachers in developing strategies to support children with disabilities in their classes. Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry was to explore how to better help Thai preschool teachers understand inclusive education practice and how to improve the learning of children with and without disabilities. To achieve this purpose, the researchers utilized a five-stage collaborative inquiry approach to assist teachers collect and, analyse data with us and inform future directions or action plans. Collaborative inquiry is a powerful design for examining teaching and learning issues because it recognises the role of teachers in school improvement as well as establishes the culture of inquiry and reflection (Donohoo, 2013; Katz, Earl & Ben Jaafar, 2009; Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). Stoll (2010) argues that collaborative inquiry catalyses teachers to "deconstruct knowledge through joint reflection and analysis, reconstructing it through collaborative action, and co-constructing it through collective learning from their experiences" (p. 474). Donohoo (2013) reiterates that collaborative inquiry enables teachers to explore educational issues in a systematic way and determine solutions through shared inquiry, reflection and dialogue. Using a collaborative inquiry approach, teachers in this research were able to develop insights into their everyday practices, what they were doing right and what they needed to improve.

Method

Participants

Participants, all females, were 11 preschool teachers (7 teachers and 4 teacher assistants) from two government and two private inclusive schools who volunteered to participate. These teachers were those whose classrooms meet the criteria of having four to five children with disability attending and have volunteered their classrooms to be observed. All the teachers have Bachelor Degrees in Education and the teacher assistants have high school diplomas.

Stage 1: Framing the problem – The researchers ran a full-day workshop on inclusive practice for the teachers after which they worked with us to develop inquiry questions about their own practices and formulate theories for action. The inquiry questions the teachers developed were: What are some of the things we are doing right that support all children to learn effectively? What are some of the things we are not doing right and need to improve? How can we implement more effective teaching for children with disability?

Stage 2: Collecting evidence – The researchers tasked the teachers to determine where in their school and from which documents to collect evidence for their inquiry questions including how to collect this evidence. This evidence was brought for discussion in the second workshop. The teachers collected evidence from their own previous teaching lesson notes, classroom practices and activities they have previously given to children. The researchers also shared their observation with the teachers to help them reflect on the inquiry questions.

Stage 3: Analysing evidence – The researchers collaborated with the teachers to analyse and make sense of the data collected by organising, reading, describing and classifying this data to identify patterns and themes and to interpret the findings.

Stage 4: Celebrating and sharing – At this stage, the team of teachers came together to celebrate and share their new understandings of inclusive practice with the researchers.

Stage 5: Future directions and follow up actions – Together with the teachers we formulated action plans about how they are going to implement their new understandings and instigate follow-up activities.

Findings from the collaborative inquiry

Inquiry question 1: *What are some of the things we are doing right that support all children to learn effectively?*

Spiritual engagement and moral learning

All the 11 teachers provided evidence of good practice by referring to their commitment to all children's spiritual and moral development. Data from sticky notes and flipcharts showed that the teachers were highly committed to developing all children's spiritual development that adheres to Buddhist religious practices and Thai moral code of respect for adults.

We instil strict discipline. We teach the children to love their country...we teach them respect. We explain to children with disability to respect their friends with disability. We make sure other children support those with disability when they are outside playing or eating. All the children pray before we start the school activities.

The collaborative inquiry participants emphasise the importance of knowing Buddhist practice principles as an important requirement of being Thai. To them, this understanding enables them to be compassionate to all children with and without disability.

Care for all the children. Protect and give compassion to the children with disability. Encourage children with disability to show compassion to other children.

Inquiry question 2: *What are some of the things we are not doing right and need to improve?*

Being neglectful due to professional knowledge and skills limitations

Collaborative inquiry participants spoke about how limited professional knowledge and skills led to practices that neglected children with disabilities. They indicated that being in the inquiry workshop together with others and having a critical friend to talk to encouraged them to collectively reflect on what they have not been successful in doing for children with disabilities. Some of the comments written on sticky notes read:

I want children with disability to benefit something from the school but I do not have the skills or techniques for teaching them.

The views expressed by the teachers further demonstrated that some had difficulty recognising some children with disabilities in the classrooms, for example, those with autism.

When I have some children with disability, I do not know they are children with disability/additional education needs because their faces or bodies do not show it to me.

In addition to limited knowledge and skills, the majority of the teachers (9 out of 11) during the collaborative inquiry workshops reported that they did not know how to modify curriculum for teaching children with disability. Some of the teachers wrote comments on flip

charts and sticky notes which reflected that they often used the same approaches and curriculum to teach the whole class irrespective of the individual children's unique needs:

When I am teaching both children with and without disability I use the same strategy and curriculum...I make children with disability do the same activities even if they can't do it because I have no idea on how to modify the curriculum.

Similarly, some of the teachers appeared to be concerned about preparing all the children in their classes to pass progression tests to enter the next level of education irrespective of their abilities or learning needs:

I give the same tests to children with disabilities but they don't do it. I worry so much about assessment and how children would pass the test to go to the next grade level...I am not sure the children with disability can pass and go to the primary school but they still study in the kindergarten here, and are not getting anything from the school... I also do not have the skills and knowledge to teach children with disability.

Another area of significance that the inquiry participants noted they were not doing well was related to the skills needed for managing children's behavioural challenges. The majority of the teachers reflected that they have ignored some of the children with a disability label several times when they exhibit challenging behaviours that were not dangerous to other children in the classrooms:

If children with disability disturb other children, I sometimes ignore them. But if they physically attack or do something dangerous to others, I have to stop them by screaming at them. I do not know other ways manage their behaviours.

Over the course of the collaborative inquiry workshops, the majority (8 out of 11) of the teachers attributed what they were not doing well to having little or no formal training in teaching children with disability/additional education needs. They claimed that although they learnt some theory about inclusive education the practical knowledge of curriculum modification, differentiated instruction, the development of IEPs, and how to support children with disability were not adequately covered.

I learnt about inclusive education when I studied at the Bachelor level. But I never do teaching practice on inclusive programmes. When I did teaching practice, they separate us between major in special education and early childhood education. I studied roughly about the theory but I did not understand deeply about inclusive programmes, how to develop IEPs, and I did not practice them in the school.

Another member of the inquiry team expressed how she faced complex challenges, doing the wrong things to children with disability because of ineffective professional training in inclusive pedagogies.

I do not have any idea about inclusion. I graduated for a long time and since I have not done any training on how to work with children with disability. I do not support children with disability...I have never taken any courses in special education or inclusion outside university so I neglected the children in the class, I see children with disability as too much of a problem.

Other members shared how their professional learning at university was inconsistent with their actual professional practice leading them to exclusive pedagogical practices:

I think what I studied did not help me in my practice. I just know about theory but if I face the real situation in the classroom, I cannot apply it to the classroom. What we learnt is not direct to the situation we face with children with disability. When I face situations presented by children with autism I do

not have any idea about it. I do not know what to do so I just ignore them which I think is not good.

In addition to professional practice, some of the teachers during the inquiry workshops were open and honest that they were not able to put into practice what they have covered on inclusive education during their training and this affected their confidence levels and practices in the inclusive classrooms:

From my teaching perspective, I am not ready to teach children with and without disability in the same classroom, to be honest, I am not ready yet, I have been doing the wrong things to the children but I don't know any other way to do it.

The collaborative inquiry workshops provided opportunity for rich conversations about how in-service professional learning provided by authorities on inclusion covered little about disability but concentrated on classical behaviourist Psychology and child development theories (e.g. child and adolescent development, Piaget's stages of development, Pavlov, Skinner and Thorndike) indicating that teacher education professional development failed to address key aspects of inclusive education:

I learnt just Psychology (Skinner, Pavlov, Piaget) during in-service training which can help me a little bit for doing my job but concerning teaching children with disability, there is never anything on this so I don't know how to cater for those children with disability with significant learning difficulties

Barriers framing poor practices

Another key finding that emerged from the collaborative inquiry workshops was how lack of necessary skills and training on inclusive education resulted in stress and powerlessness for most teachers, which they transferred into unresponsive teaching practices. The teachers' felt most frustrated and stressed when trying to manage children with disabilities' behaviour outbursts.

I feel frustrated when children with disability are aggressive while I am teaching in the classroom. I struggle to understand what they want...I sometimes drag them out or send them away to the exclusive zone.

There was evidence to suggest that when the classrooms seemed chaotic the teachers would stop teaching the whole class in order to remove children with disability from the situation. This was highlighted as difficult by the class teachers and included their revelations about their stress that they were not meeting the needs of children with autism labels in their respective classrooms:

When children with disability are frustrated, it can affect other children in the classroom. Sometime I have to stop teaching when they cry very loud which prevent other children from concentrating on the lesson...I scream aloud sometimes to stop the situation but it does not work, it is nightmare...I know it is not good to scream at children but how can I do the right thing if I don't know it?

Teacher perspectives on their knowledge of inclusive education for young children obtained from the collaborative inquiry workshops suggested a feeling of helplessness and stress leading to a lack of provision of appropriate support to children with disability including managing challenging behaviours. Some other teachers indicated that they were concerned about their lack of skills and knowledge levels in terms of how they were providing attention to all children in inclusive classrooms:

We should realise that our inability have some consequences for children with and without disability. In addition, children without disability may not have sufficient understanding between children with typically developing and children with additional needs...Children might have questions in their mind why this child has different behaviour from their peers, why does the teacher give more attention to him or provide less work to him than other children.

Taking a critical stand, some of the teachers felt that children with disability must be ready before they access inclusive education. This means, they must acquire some basic learning skills before coming to mainstream schools. They further indicated that they were more in favour of children with physical disability accessing inclusive education and that they thought children with autism must be separated into special classes.

In my opinion, I first thought if children with disability are ready, they can learn with children without disability in the same classroom...I think it is good for children with mild disability because it helps them to live with other people in real society. However, children with autism, I think they should have separated them from those without disability because it was adding a difficult task to our work.

We do not have knowledge about inclusion and we are not specialist in special education so do not teach these children properly. If we were concentrating only on the child with disability in the classroom who will look after other children...we have to look after them too and this was too difficult.

The teachers also documented how the rigid school timetable, several teacher meetings and increasing amount of paper work interfered with their work and led to stress and helplessness reduced their instructional time and the time they spent with the young children.

I just worry that I do not use enough time to care for and teach children with disabilities in the classroom. I rush to finish my work on time because I have so many things to do. I have to organise children for school bus every morning and afternoon and do paper work.

Another sticky note comment reads:

I want to do so many things to develop children's ability but I cannot do it because the school has so many things for teachers to do. I want the school to reduce some of the paper work because teachers do not have only teaching or caring for children but there are so many things to do.

Some of the teachers discussed that the numbers of children with disability who were included in their classrooms influenced the level of teachers' stress and pressure which led to bad teaching in inclusive classrooms:

If only one child with disability is in the classroom, I think it is ok but there are many children with disability and some are not assessed yet, I cannot manage such a class so I just teach like there is no child needs additional support, I mean no recognition of them in the class.

Inquiry question 3: *How can we implement more effective teaching for children with disability?*

Professional learning and pedagogical change

Over the course of the collaborative inquiry sessions, participant teachers developed new understandings of how to support children with disabilities in their classrooms. An example was a collaborative development of an annual Individual Learning Plans (IEPs) for

each child with a disability using case examples from their respective classrooms. The IEPs cover aspects of key teaching and learning areas the teachers would like the children to excel in. Parents were invited to the IEP meetings and encouraged to contribute to the IEP goals for individual children. The participants also discussed the termly review process of the IEP goals based on each child's strengths and weaknesses and highlighted the need to work towards individual needs even in the face of time constraints and workloads as they realise that as teachers, they have responsibility for all the children and not just a selected few.

I now see all children as central to my work as a teacher, realising the damage I have done to children with disability previously, made me think, I have opportunity work towards individual needs with my new understanding of inclusion...I will no longer think of time, and workload, I think of children and their rights to learn.

Other participants noted in their comments how they now perceive screaming at children a thing of the past.

Through the workshops, I come to realise how screaming at children, particularly those with disability makes things worse. Now instead of screaming when the children do not behave well, I encourage them to explain their needs and to choose which work they are more comfortable in doing during the day instead of forcing them to do activities that they do not understand or have interest in.

The post workshop sharing and celebration session identified that the teachers are transforming their practices not only for children with disabilities, but also for all children.

My approach to children have changed, I am now a little flexible than previously. I am shifting from just focusing on what is in the textbook or workbook to allow children to suggest some themes for us to supplement the curriculum. I see that when children bring ideas, they become involved and we save a lot of time that I would have spent shouting, hey stop this, you stop that and so on.

One of the greatest impacts of the study was the realisation of the participants that they have to continue learning on their own to be able to improve practice.

The collaborative inquiry sessions have empowered us. We can now choose a topic on our own and come together to discuss it. This is good for us in keeping our knowledge updated. If we have difficulty, or do not understand what to do in a situation, we schedule a time and meet and search for ideas around that problem and how to go about it.

The participants also reported that they need to further explore assessment and strategies for modifying curriculum for children with disabilities.

We learnt a lot but knowing more about how to assess learning progress of children with disabilities as well as modify curriculum for them can help us provide appropriate support for them.

These comments suggest that the collaborative inquiry research approach adopted in this study lead to the opening of new insights of the power of collaborative learning on significant issues such as dealing with inclusive pedagogical issues in holistic and non-threatening ways. For example, through collaborative inquiry there seemed to be a reduction in the gap between the concepts of inclusion from the perspectives of researchers and those of individual teachers by giving the participant teachers control of making their experiences and practices visible.

Discussion

Implications and moving forward

The purpose of this study was to explore how to better help Thai preschool teachers understand inclusive education practice and how to improve the learning of children with and without disabilities. Through the study findings it became apparent that the future of preschool inclusive education needs to begin with collaborative teacher training and professional learning (Donohoo, 2013; Katz, Earl & Ben Jaafar, 2009; Stoll, 2010). The data of this research showed openness and shared experiences leading to the participant teachers rethinking their beliefs and practices hence, a collaborative teacher training will offer similar opportunity to trainees in learning *with* their trainers. Through collaborative teacher training both trainers and trainees can formulate learning goals, discuss different perspectives, compare and contrast insights regarding differences and collectively refine what is important for their particular education contexts. While it can be acknowledged that the inclusive discourse emphasises that teachers must respond to individual children's needs, the challenge of limited knowledge, and the lack of professional preparedness can be addressed through professional learning that establishes the culture of inquiry and reflection (Stoll, 2010). The study have shown that collaborative inquiry provides a space for multi-voices for conceptualising and gathering ongoing evidence regarding areas of limited professional knowledge and training and ineffective teaching so as to dismantle pedagogical boundaries for effective practice. This illustrates the need for a transformative professional learning. Transformative professional learning is that which provides the appropriate tools, skills and capabilities teacher's need to be able to work successfully with children with disability (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson & Zine, 2000). This means, teachers and all stakeholders must be brought together to learn *with*, learn *from* and learn *about* each other's practices, and teachers must be allowed to identify topics that are relevant to their specific needs for their professional learning.

The professional inquiry workshop sessions provided opportunities for the participants to reflect on their own practices as well as gain some insights into the philosophies of inclusive education. Furthermore, creating inclusive practices that go beyond a particular classroom requires strong leadership, including the vision of families and communities in a collaborative consultation to increase their knowledge with other professionals (Agbenyega & Sharma, 2014). Over the course of the research, there was evidence to suggest transformation that emanates from inside of teachers rather than those pressured from outside. It helped the preschool teachers discovered the purpose of education for all children and not just a selected few. This purpose mirrored what Earl (2003) has argued, that:

We each need to take the time to decide what it is that we believe education is for; not because someone tells us, or the rules dictate, but because we believe it is right and just. Once we have an image of the future we prefer, getting there is possible. It may be difficult; we may have to change, to learn, to live in dissonance, and to stand firm in our beliefs. But it is possible (p. 4).

The collaborative inquiry provided a new and specific opportunity for the Thai preschool teachers in this research to contribute their own understanding of how they want to transform inclusive education and not because they were told by the researchers. By engaging in this research they were able to identify what they were doing right and what they needed to change to make their practices responsive to the needs of their students. This was a great learning journey that helped them to carve a new image of inclusive education that they are currently working towards as indicated in the following statement, "*we are now working as a*

team and researchers so that we can help all children learn effectively and not just as teachers waiting for someone to come and tell us everything. We are trying to form a network of colleagues and extend these collaborative learning circles to improve inclusive practice”.

On the basis of this we argue that effective inclusive education requires transformative teacher education for teachers to enhance their knowledge and take leadership roles including learning about the nature of children, how they are different and how differently they learn (Agbenyega & Sharma, 2014). Requisite professional knowledge and appropriate training empowers teachers and help to reduce helplessness (Soodak, Erwin, Winton, Brotherson, Turnbull, Hanson & Brault, 2002) often experienced by teachers in inclusive classrooms. Quality inclusive early childhood education cannot just happen without a clear image of what it is all about; it has to be developed, implemented and evaluated at both systemic and practical levels. This includes a commitment of teacher educators to embrace partnerships with teachers and adopt new ways of thinking and doing education (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2012; Tomanovic, 2003). Finally, teachers must consider the role of professional placements in inclusive classrooms as essential so that they can see best practices of inclusive education. More importantly, teacher training and professional learning should prepare teachers to become open to multiple perspectives by sharing good and ineffective practices from which new insights for the future can emerge.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are of particular relevance to advancing inclusive education in countries that are struggling to implement effective practice. This is because the collaborative inquiry in this research addressed some aspects of the teachers' teaching but the ongoing nature of this approach is important as there were additional areas such as effective assessment processes and curriculum modification that these teachers need to explore to further develop their skills in teaching children with disabilities. The researchers have realised that to move forward is to juxtapose ineffective pedagogy with a new image of inclusive education from which teachers can develop further lines of inquiry to construct practices that would help them achieve their new image as inclusive educators. Collaborative inquiry, when done appropriately can be a powerful tool for teachers to identify and develop their craft knowledge towards effective inclusive practice.

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